



# Wisconsin State Legislature

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## Representative Kessler and Senator Harsdorf Introduce Sudan Divestment Legislation

MADISON - Flanked by a Sudan refugee with experience about the toll of civil war and genocide in Darfur, Sudan, Wisconsin State Senator Sheila Harsdorf (R – River Falls) and Representative Fred Kessler (D – Milwaukee) introduced legislation to disassociate Wisconsin from the atrocities being committed by the central government of Sudan.

“Wisconsin should divest itself from genocide in Sudan,” said Harsdorf. “With the genocide ongoing, we have the moral obligation to divest, both as a tool to exert economic pressure and as importantly, to ensure that the rape, murder, and denial of basic humanitarian aid is not done on Wisconsin’s dime.”

The divestment legislation has thirty sponsors with bipartisan support. Wisconsin is one of over twenty states actively pursuing Sudan divestment strategies.

“States are deciding that enough is enough,” said Kessler. “We simply cannot sit back watching our investment boards indirectly fund genocide as it is ongoing. Wisconsin must do its part to remove itself from foreign companies that act with complete disregard for human life.”

The Sudan divestment legislation is targeted at foreign companies that supply critical revenue to the Sudan government used to carry out the genocide. The bill has mechanisms that significantly ease the burden in identifying companies to divest from, while safeguarding the portfolios of the State of Wisconsin Investment Board by relaxing divestment requirements if values decline by more than .05%.

Mr. August Mayai, a Sudanese refugee and Wisconsin graduate student, has joined legislators in support of the bill. In 1987, civil war in Sudan drove an estimated 20,000 young boys from their families and villages in south Sudan. Mr. Mayai, then age seven, was one of the refugees fleeing to Ethiopia to escape death or induction into slavery and the northern army. Separated from his parents and family in the chaos of war, August walked more than 561 miles to escape death and slavery, with little food or water. More than half of his group died before reaching a Kenyan refugee camp years later.

“I am pleased that Wisconsin lawmakers have taken the initiative to do what they can to stop the pain and devastation being wrought in my native country,” said Mayai. “Even as the genocide seems like a world away, I know that if enough people were intimately familiar with the pillaging in Darfur, they would not turn the other way. I am here to tell my story, in the hopes that excuses and apathy are rejected in favor of action to do everything possible to end genocide.”

Joining lawmakers at the press conference were grassroots activists, including Branton Kunz, Director of the Wisconsin Sudan Divestment Campaign and Sachin Chheda, Coordinator of the Darfur Action Coalition of Wisconsin.

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